**"BY HER UNNATURAL AND DESPICABLE CONDUCT": MOTHERHOOD AND CONCUBINAGE IN THE WATCHMAN AND JAMAICA FREE PRESS, 1830-1833**

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Between the spring of 1830 and the passing of the British Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, The *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, Jamaica's first newspaper owned and run by a person of colour, featured approximately forty letters to the editor discussing brown women engaged in relationships of sexual-economic exchange with white men—or interracial concubinage.[1] There were several concerns raised in these letters about interracial non-marital sex,, the most pertinent of which centered on the impact of these women's sexual behaviour on their role as mothers. Using these letters to the editor published in the *Watchman* as my focus, this article will discuss the discourses around the maternal practices of free women, particularly those accused of being concubines, and the perceived inability of these women to be good mothers. It will begin by exploring the political and cultural context for the letters to the editor published in the *Watchman* before turning to the discussion around concubines and motherhood found in the newspaper. As the community of colour achieved civil equality and amidst the heightened debates about the continuation of slavery of the 1820s and early 1830s, women's engagement in interracial concubinage, a customary form of sexual-economic exchange within the colony during the slavery period, marked them as degraded women and 'bad mothers', not only a danger to the respectable family unit, but also a hindrance to the community's efforts for equality. For respectable members of the free community,

that some brown women choose to have non-marital sexual relationships with white men became evidence of their inability to be good mothers.

The letters to the editor reveal the centrality of motherhood to discussions around the place of the free community of colour in the period leading to abolition. For 'respectable' members of the community, women's role as mothers was integral to their vision of equality in Jamaica. In this vision women of colour took up their 'proper' place within the community as mothers to legitimate children and wives to brown men, roles denied them by the degraded and white supremacist system of slavery. It is rare to encounter archival sources authored by free people of colour that discuss issues of gender, family, sexuality and community.[2] As such, these letters also provide a glimpse into attitudes held by some free people of colour in Jamaica, as highlight the contested nature and cultural changes around 'motherhood' and family strategies as Jamaica transitioned from a slave to an ostensibly 'free' society.

**FREE COMMUNITY OF COLOUR**

The free population of colour in Jamaica, made up most frequently of the offspring of black or brown women and white men, unions of varying degrees of consent and lack of consent, steadily grew throughout the eighteenth century. By 1834, according to one estimate, the free community of colour totaled around 30,000 or 8.5 percent of Jamaica's population, twice the number of whites and three times the number of free blacks living in the colony.[3] As the population of people of colour increased, what was once a scattered group of people began to unify, politicize and form their own identity politics.[4] The development of a politicized free community of colour was fostered by the discrimination

they faced and the efforts of white Creoles to create a 'buffer' group between free whites and enslaved blacks. Thus, free people of colour occupied an ambiguous position within Jamaican society. To keep them in their place, the planter-dominated Assembly enacted a series of laws throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that restricted the accumulation of wealth and property, social mobility and political power. They were denied the right to vote, to be elected to the legislature and the right to hold public office, amongst other legal restrictions.[5] Agitation around these discriminatory laws began in the late eighteenth century but picked up momentum by 1813 when members of the community and their representatives submitted a series of petitions, engaged in various debates in Jamaica and in Britain, and formed alliances across the British Atlantic to push for a change in legislation. The Jamaican House of Assembly slowly granted piecemeal concessions, including increasing the number of Acts of Privilege, privileges granted on an individual basis to free brown and black people that gave them the same legal status as whites. The legal restrictions on the community of colour were removed in December 1830; however, discriminatory practices and inequality continued to restrict the community.

An understanding of the movement for civil equality, and discussion of women's maternal and sexual praxis, cannot be separated from the larger debate and agitation during this period around the continuation of slavery. At the same time free people of colour were signing petitions, writing letters, and challenging the legal basis for inequalities they faced in Jamaica, abolitionist and anti-slavery activist jostled with proslavery advocates to depict the 'truth about the system of slavery' and debate the continuation of the system. Using various sites in both the metropole and the colony, both

pro and antislavery advocates engaged in what Catherine Hall calls the 'war of representation', utilizing propaganda to influence public opinion on the matter of slavery.[6] The attack on slavery was essentially an attack on, the predominately white and male, slaveholders that benefited from the system of slavery. At the heart of this attack were claims that these white men had deviated from British conceptions of respectable masculinity and were 'un-English'.[7] Though many of the members of the free community of colour held antislavery sympathies, the community did not take an explicit position on the issue. Instead, the politically-engaged and nonconformist members of the community used the heightened conflicts over slavery to further challenge the political dominance of the white planter elite and to voice their own demands for the elimination of the civil and legal inequalities they suffered.

One of the goals within this struggle was in contradicting the community's image represented by the overtly-sexualized black or brown woman. By the end of the eighteenth century, on the rural plantations and in the towns of the Jamaica, the pervasiveness of interracial sex was a regular and frequent topic of discussion in the textual narratives and visual depictions of the region that found audience in the metropole in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As much as the tropical climate, exotic species of animals or plants, disease, death or sugar, the brown or black female concubine constituted a formative part of the imagery representative of Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. Thus for men of colour, part of the challenge of claiming citizenship was recasting representations of the free community of colour as respectable and masculinized—subverting the long-entrenched representation of the community as, in the words of Melanie Newton, 'women whose public role was sexual transgression' and their

illegitimate mixed-race offspring.[8] In order to do so, as Gad Heuman argues, these men sought to highlight their socio-cultural and moral affinity to a British Christian and middling class respectability in order to lay claim to the civil and political rights and authority they felt entitled to as loyal subjects to the crown.[9] As Mimi Sheller notes in her rich study of political consciousness and agency in early nineteenth-century Jamaica, middling class members of the community performed gendered roles of respectability and domesticity that resonated with prevailing evangelical ideals in Britain and local missionaries. The 'duties and obligations for men' included 'to earn a living, to support a family, to marry, and to take an active part in politics'.[10] Their adherence to Christian understandings of gendered roles set them apart from the infamous representations of white Creoles as immoral, licentious, debased and 'un-English'. As declared in the *Watchman*, men of colour 'are now, comparatively speaking, as well informed as their oppressors; in point of number, they are superior'.[11] A crucial part of the claim for equality made by respectable men of colour was their moral elevation compared with white Creole elites, and their affinity to Britain, both in terms of loyalty and in cultural and moral values. However, this claim could only be made if free women of colour, *their* women, adhered to similar scripts of respectability.

Within the ideals of gender and domesticity, respectability for women meant the performance of modesty, participation in religious activities and sexual reservation—chastity prior to marriage and restraint throughout. Newton's study of women in Barbados shows that in the years leading up to emancipation and after, philanthropy became the 'platform' from which women could gain authority and respect in the 'eyes of the community'.[12] In Jamaica, some free women, particularly women of colour, engaged

in similar modes of respectability. Women expressed their adherence to respectable Christian modes of gender through their active participation in British Nonconformist churches. Many free women of colour found organizational and leadership roles in these churches, particularly the Wesleyan Methodist church.[13] Active participation in the church garnered these women respect and social elevation in the community. It was 'a stage for parading the domesticity of the nonwhite elite, illustrated by the conformity of many privileged women of colour to new standards of "respectable" femininity'.[14]

At the heart of middle-class respectability in the years preceding emancipation in Jamaica was the domestic unit in which the husband, the head of the family, operated in the public sphere as the breadwinner outside of the home. The man's role as husband was predicated upon women taking up their place as the keeper of the home, a space of 'proper moral order' and retreat from the 'amoral world of the market'. Within the home women could take charge of the spiritual and moral education of those who resided within it, namely her children.[15] The widespread involvement of free women of colour in non-marital and sexual-economic relationships with white men was discussed in the letters to the *Watchman* a direct challenge to this performance of respectable domesticity and motherhood and therefore a cause for the whole community's concern.

## THE WATCHMAN AND THE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Towards the end of slave period the *Watchman* was one of the central sites of political engagement and the 'mouthpiece' of liberal members of the free community of colour in Jamaica. [16] Between 1829 and 1837 Edward Jordan and Robert Osborn, two well-

educated and prominent men of colour, ran the newspaper. Jordan, the son of a black woman and free man of colour, and Osborn, the son of a wealthy Scottish planter and a black enslaved woman, were both active members in the movement for civil equality.[17] The content of the paper was explicitly anti-establishment and it was the only newspaper published in Jamaica at the time that was not sympathetic to the planter elite. As Mavis Campbell writes of the *Watchman*, 'its language...was uncompromisingly irreverent to the ruling class of the colony, and it exposed with the greatest alacrity abuse and corruption in high places.'[18] As one of the few liberal newspapers published by men of colour in the Caribbean, the *Watchman* positioned itself as a direct challenge and in opposition to the authority of the planter and white elites.[19]

The *Watchman* was also significant in defining the cultural contours of the 'respectable' free community of colour and showcasing to the wide readership, their values. It was a means for the respectable members of the community to challenge the image of the community as immoral and to present an alternative image of the community going into the post-slavery period. In the decades preceding the abolition of slavery, as Alpen Razi writes, 'newspapers [like the *Watchman* in Jamaica] became the primary vehicle through which individual readers learned to see themselves as inhabiting a common space, imagining themselves as members of an emerging nation and shared national culture...'"[20] It was a space where people of colour could air grievances and share opinions about issues effecting the community, but also articulate the values and customs that were acceptable and those that were not. Such values and customs were integral to the 'house style' or voice of the newspaper.[21] In the case of the *Watchman*, its 'voice' was one of evangelical reform, as well as middling class notions of gender, family and

respectability. As one contributor to the paper put it, the *Watchman* was the 'guardian of public morals'.[22] In the letters and articles published in the newspaper, and those it chose to omit, the *Watchman* worked to sustain this reputation and to engage in a performance of respectability. As such, the letters to the editor that will be discussed further below should be read as performative, part of a larger effort on the part of the 'respectable' members of the community to highlight its adherence to British Christian ideals of gender and domesticity and its opposition to the immorality of slave society.

Between April 1830 and February 1834, the *Watchman* published approximately forty letters to the editor discussing non-marital sexual relationships between white men and free women of colour in Jamaica.[23] The authors of the letters are for the most part unknown. Some Methodist preachers, such as Thomas Pennock, signed their names to letters. But most authors used a pseudonym or only a first name. While it may be impossible to identify the authors by name, the way the letters were written, the language used, and the references can provide some insight that may help better understand the discourse found in the *Watchman*. Some correspondents used names that indicated their racial, gender and marital status, such as 'A Coloured Christian', or 'An unmarried women'. Some of the correspondents adopt pseudonyms from Roman history, Greek mythology, and classic literature and poetry. Others also use names that feature in popular evangelical texts. For instance, Coeleb, a frequent contributor to the *Watchman*, was also the name of the protagonist in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, Hannah More's 1809 celebration of gentile domesticity and middling class respectability.[24] The pseudonyms suggest the contributors, and likely the readers, to the *Watchman* were educated and part of the politically-engaged Non-Conformist community.

Based on the pseudonyms and the content of some of the letters, most of the authors appear to be male and most state they are of colour or refer to being of colour. There are only five authors who claim or appear to be women, but only three state or indicate explicitly that they are women of colour. Although, as I will discuss more below, most of the authors recount anecdotes or experiences of encounters with concubines, and many reference the large number of women involved in such practices that they know personally, none of the authors claim to be a concubine. Moreover, except for one of the letters apparently authored by a woman of colour, none of the authors acknowledge being the offspring of such women. Most of the authors claim to be respectable and slightly distant observers of this vice and its effects. By the 1830s concubinage had become a stigma amongst the 'respectable' community of colour that warranted such distance, even if just within the letters to the editor.

**MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND INTERRACIAL SEX**

Correspondents in the *Watchman* discussed concubines as complicit in their own downfall, as well as in the degradation of their families and community.[25] Most attributed the supposed continued prevalence of the system to mothers and the example that they set for younger women. Mothers, after all, were responsible for the moral and spiritual education of children.[26] In many letters to the editor, mothers were described as the 'more immediate cause of their children's dishonor'.[27] 'The system is continued because it is countenanced,' wrote Coeleb, 'and I am aware that the charge lays immediately with the mothers.'[28] However, it was not all mothers that were accused of continuing this practice, but 'those of more "olden times"'.[29] The continuation of concubinage 'arises principally

from the examples furnished them by the veterans of the old school, who are themselves either hypocritical pretenders to religion, positive enemies, or affected sceptics [sic]', wrote another correspondent.[30] These were women who continued to abide by the customs of an immoral slave society and a system that was closer and closer to ending. According to the *Watchman*, such women had not progressed morally, despite the religious, political and social strides the community as a whole had made in the last decade. These women remained symbols of the depravity inherent in slavery, a system that was based on the idea that 'bodies were for sale'.[31]

Most of those who wrote in and had letters published in the *Watchman* discussed interracial concubinage as a form of sexual-economic exchange—the exchange of sexual and domestic services for money or property. While some of the correspondents made mention of these brown women being 'seduced' by white men, for the most part they were discussed as actively engaging and seeking out these relationships for financial gain. However, there was some debate on why, despite the religious, social and moral progress of the community, the 'old dames' but also younger brown women, continued to pursue such relationships and thereby degrade themselves. This debate revolved around two poles—these women were motivated by either materialism or survival. Most of the commentators discussed and attributed concubinage to the former. For instance, Crabstick, a frequent commentator in the *Watchman*, noted that it was 'the prevailing idolatrous devotion to extreme finery' that compelled some women to abandon chastity and morality. Similarly, Constantia, one of the few correspondents who claimed to be a woman, wrote that it was the lack of 'industrious habits' and love of finery among some coloured women that led to their downfall. As she quotes her mother, a concubine, as

stating, ‘married women do seldom or never command the means to make them stylish.’[32] Lucretius shared these attitudes, but felt concubinage was particularly rampant amongst poorer women of colour. These women, he argued, possess ‘a silly and foolish pride—they think it degrading to follow any occupation or calling other than that of needle work; and as this latter species of employment cannot produce a sufficiency to support them, they enroll themselves under the banners of prostitution and concubinage’.[33]

Despite such assertions, not all the letters presented or shared this attitude. A small number of contributors saw concubinage as an income-generating activity that women accessed out of need to provide for their children and family. A Man of Colour, an otherwise outspoken critic of concubines, wrote that “some of the coloured females are compelled from dire necessity to embrace this mode of procuring a livelihood,” singling out mothers as those who were so compelled.[34] However, he was not the only one to write explicitly about the role of interracial sex as income-generation for women. In another letter, Lavinia, who describes herself as a young and respectable woman, reported an encounter she had in Kingston with a woman who she nicknames ‘Miss Voluble’, likely as a way of indicating that the woman is not just chatty, but also a gossip. Lavinia describes Miss Voluble as ‘about 45, and “the lady”, as they are so called, of an eminent merchant in this city, who died a few years ago’. Lavinia presents Miss Voluble as one of the ‘old dames’ and as an example of the low morality amongst some women of colour. According to Lavinia, Miss Voluble defended her decision to become a concubine on the basis that her relationship with a white man provided the financial means to support not only herself but also her mother and family. “Don’t you remember your poor

mother?" she supposedly said to Lavinia "Wouldn't [sic] you lie to get something to put her decently under the ground, and you know you can't do it well except you have a friend.' And by a friend she means that 'eminent merchant who has recently passed'. In this passage, Miss Voluble identified her choices in terms of her own financial necessity, but also in terms of her responsibility as a good daughter to her 'poor mother'. Like 'A Man of Colour', 'Miss Voluble' describes financial necessity as an understandable motivation for women and a mother to engage in such sexual practices—financial need is as important to childrearing and family as spiritual and moral upbringing. The presentation of this position was rare within the forty letters to the editor published in the *Watchman*. Although most of the correspondents acknowledged that interracial concubinage was, for many women and mothers, a way of 'procuring a livelihood', for most, including 'A Man of Colour' and the letter authored by Lavinia about 'Miss Voluable', sexual-economic exchange remained a 'disgraceful livelihood' and one that was inexcusable and contrary to proper role of mothers and respectable domesticity.[35] It was the role of men, and of husbands, to provide financially for the family. Thus, for the *Watchman's* correspondents, it was not only the non-marital nature of concubinage but also the fact that some women engaged in it to make money that was important. By doing so, women were seen to be rejecting normative gendered scripts of motherhood. The implication in these letters and discourse was that if women were focused on material and monetary gain, they could not be focused on their proper role, as spiritual and moral educators of children.

The idea of brown women obsessed with money and material gain, to the detriment of their offspring, was not a new trope within sexual-racialized discourses of

women of African descent. These articles in the *Watchman* drew upon longstanding stereotypes of black and brown women and motherhood found in text throughout slavery. According to numerous accounts in Jamaica, but also in other parts of the Anglo-Caribbean, mothers often encouraged and assisted their mixed-race daughters in soliciting white men for temporary and long-term sexual relationships.[36] For example, John Clarke, a member of the Baptist Missionary Society, described Port Royal in 1815 as 'abominable and unclean'. To illuminate this point to his readers, he pointed out that black and brown mothers, women he referred to as 'whore-mongers, in the form of parents,' held no shame in prostituting their daughters. As he stated, they 'made it no secret and that it is no disgrace, to sell their daughters to naval and military officers, for the purpose of prostitution.'[37] By the time concubinage was being discussed in the *Watchman*, the stereotype of the brown women 'pimping' her daughter to a white man was already ingrained within discourses around women of colour and motherhood in Jamaica.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that in critiquing concubinage letters to the editor published in the *Watchman* employed this trope to illustrate the immoral parenting of concubines. Brown concubines were accused of raising their daughters to see nothing wrong in non-marital sexual relations and to become the lovers of white men. As Lucretius stated, 'It is not much rather to be expected, that as they have been schooled to vice from their earliest years, and taught to believe that concubinage is no crime, they will bring up their daughters to tread in their own footsteps?'[38] Another wrote that these mothers were below the 'brute creation…for the brutes evince more regard for their young than these people, who shew no proper regard for their children after birth,

inasmuch as they generally encourage them both by example and precept to follow them in their wicked paths, and anticipate misery for them before they are born'.[39] These women did not occupy the proper role as wives nor mothers. Not only did they not provide their children with moral or spiritual direction, but they were accused of actively leading their children astray.

Several of the letter writers provided first-hand accounts to support their claims around concubines and motherhood. Some fit so neatly into the narrative of the uncaring mother and morally corrupt concubine that overall these anecdotes raise questions around the authenticity of the letters and the authors of those letters published in the *Watchman*. The letters of Constantia, for instance, a person who describes herself as the offspring of a white father and a brown woman, provides an example of the perfectly constructed anecdote. In her letter, Constantia describes how her mother demanded that she become the mistress of a white man. 'In me, an unfortunate young female,' she writes, 'destined by an unfeeling parent, for the sake of lucre...though it may prove for a time, comparatively replete with the tinsel and false glare of tempting spendour [sic], yet I am aware, must end in sorrow and self reproach.' She continues, 'If I refuse to be a Concubine I shall be despised and cast off by my mother, whose favorite saying is "that so long as the Barracks contain soldiers her daughters should never be married'.[40] Constantia story of woe provided readers in the *Watchman* evidence to support claims that concubines degraded their daughters and were keen on perpetuating the system of concubinage and perhaps the system of slavery and racial inequality. Other anecdotes published in the *Watchman* also contributed to this narrative of motherhood. A Man of Colour recounted a story of a 'gentleman' he knew, who on his deathbed, asked his

brown mistress that their two daughters be 'brought up in the paths of virtue'. Instead of fulfilling her promise, writes A Man of Colour, the brown mother encouraged a 'match' between one of her daughters and a white man, 'although cautioned, by an unknown writer, to beware of her daughter's seducer.'[41] What is interesting about this anecdote is that the promise this brown woman made was to her white 'gentleman'. Although he had engaged in this immoral relationship, on his deathbed he endeavored that his brown daughters not follow the path of their mother and in doing so redeemed himself. However, the brown mother not only broke her promise, but also betrayed her daughters. In this narrative, even a white man could see the error of his ways and endeavor to save his brown daughter, but the brown mother, so morally bankrupt, could not.[42]

In another letter, Umbra, who describes himself as a man of colour, conveyed a similar story of a debased brown mother. After four months' absence, he returned to town and a lodging house he had frequently visited. There he found the owner of the lodging house, a free woman of colour, distraught. When queried, she confessed to him:

> Oh dear, Sir, that vile, insignificant set of mulatto boys, who carry on that disgraceful paper they call the Watchman, has been turning my silly daughter's head to such a degree that she positively declares, she will no longer suffer herself to be kept by Mr._____, a gentleman, my dear Sir, that has rendered her as happy as a Princess! He has given her no less than five slaves a nice dwelling house in Lad's lane. She has a horse and chaise at her command, and every thing she can desire; yet, this silly body of a daughter will allow this seditious meddling Watchman to disturb her in her prosperity. I will be glad to see where she will be able to find one of the whole of the coloured race that will do half as much as that for her.[43]

Not only was the landlady upset that her daughter was reconsidering her three-year relationship with a white man, she had begun to avoid his company. The mother in this narrative was so upset by her daughter's behaviour that she threatened to 'disown and

disinherit' her daughter if she 'persisted in keeping away from Mr.__, and should disgrace herself by marrying one of those silly brown boys.'[44] For this mother, the financial means and security she could achieve in a non-marital sexual relationship with a white man was more important than the Christian virtues advocated by the *Watchman* and 'those silly brown boys'. Umbra describes the landlady's attitude towards marriage and men of her own class as a clear indication of her degradation and proof that she was not a good mother. He claimed to be so upset by this women's lack of morality and offense towards men of colour that he 'assured her that everything which had transpired should be carefully related to the Watchman' before settling his bill and leaving her premises.[45]

The publication of this letter served an additional purpose beyond the content. The 'debased' mother's description of the paper as 'that disgraceful paper' and Jordan and Osborn as 'vile, insignificant set of mulatto boys' may have been quite strategic. By publishing this letter, and other letters in which the *Watchman* was a point of discussion, Jordan could highlight the role of the newspaper as 'guardian of public morals' and active in exposing the vices prevalent in the society. These letters were performative, a way for Jordan and the other contributors to the paper to demonstrate their respectability and distinguish themselves from the dysfunction and disorder of the slave society.

In these accounts of brown mothers and concubines, the women are blinded by their own immorality, they are uncaring parents unable to see the errors of their ways. Such women, as a A Man of Colour wrote, were 'unquestionably more criminal than her degraded child!!' and perhaps even the men involved.[46] Not once in any of the letters to the editor and the anecdotes about mothers selling their daughters are fathers or other

male relatives, whether they are white or brown, involved in prostituting their daughters. On the contrary, both in the letters and in other texts on concubinage during this period, fathers are generally described as attempting to prevent their daughter's degradation, such as in the anecdote recounted by A Man of Colour above, in which a white father on his death bed made his brown mistress promise that their daughters would not become concubines. Instead it was women who, focused on material gain, were said to sell their children 'for the purposes of prostitution'. I have located only a very small number of references to black or brown fathers 'selling' his daughter to the 'highest bidder'.[47] The absence of male family members, such as a brother or father, in discussions around the solicitation and negotiation of sexual-economic exchange could be indicative of representations of the community of colour as feminized in colonial discourse. It may also reflect the matriarchal nature of brown families during this period. Lucille Mathurin Mair shows in her seminal study of black, white and brown women in Jamaica, free women of colour in urban towns tended to live in families dominated by women and headed by an older woman. Though the women in these family units may not have been blood kin, the matriarch served as a mother figure, uniting these women and seeking out the best economic options for her 'children' and the larger family unit.[48] The female-headed household and the supposed absence of brown fathers may partially explain the absence of these men in the long-standing trope discussed above. Moreover, as mothers were responsible for providing children with religious and moral education, any failure could be blamed on their bad parenting strategies.

Umbra's story, like the others published in the *Watchman*, contributed to a discourse around the dysfunctional role of mothers in Jamaica. These women, who were

or had been involved in interracial concubinage, encouraged or forced their daughters to have similar relationships with white men, in complete opposition to the proper role of mothers as moral educators. These anecdotes draw heavily upon pernicious tropes of motherhood, race and sex during slavery. And while the authenticity of such letters is questionable, and the narratives perhaps fabricated, the fact that Jordan publishes them speaks to a prevalent discourse around concubinage and motherhood.[49] These testimonies illustrates a common argument in the *Watchman*—that a concubine was not concerned with her daughter's spiritual or emotional wellbeing, but was instead focused exclusively on the income her daughter could generate. Free women's engagement in interracial sexual-economic relationships with white men was indicative of their inability to care for and properly raise moral and respectable daughters.

But it was not just the impact that concubines had on their daughters that was of issue in the letters to the editor. By engaging in sexual non-marital relationships with white men, concubines denied their sons the right to a father and a 'respectable' role model. 'The baneful effects' of concubinage, wrote Patricus, 'still too prevalent...has robbed the infant of a father's protection, and cut asunder all the ties of paternal affection.'[50] White fathers were described as abandoning their children, leaving 'helpless children forsaken and fatherless, while their fathers are not only in being, but also in affluence.' It was thus little wonder that, as A Man of Colour wrote, 'we find the sons of such women at times give themselves up to despair—all owing to their mother's conduct." Seeing their mothers engage in these immoral relationships and without the support of brown father caused young men of colour emotional distress, shame and despair.

Such relationships also undermined the authority of brown fathers and emasculated brown men. In a letter to the editor 'Moralitas' wrote that 'Miss M.C---, a young female of respectable family' was about to become the concubine to a white man. Moralitas was upset that a woman he considered 'respectable' would even consider entering such a relationship instead of a respectable marriage with a brown man. He wrote 'I fondly expected, that when those bonds which bound the coloured man had busted, and he had become a free denizen, capable of being advanced to offices of honour and trust, a certain degree of sympathy would be encouraged between him and his countrywomen.' Both brown men and women had suffered from the system of slavery and racial inequality. 'They have both tasted the bitter coup of oppression, the former by being paralyzed in his energies, and impeded in his path to fame and honour, the latter by being compelled to sacrifice her virtue, and become a victim to the force of custom.' However, with the passing of legislation that removed racial inequality, such oppression should have ended. That brown woman continued to pursue such relationships of 'vice and infamy' was, for Moralitas, beyond comprehension. The impact of such relationships on brown men was a particularly sore spot for Moralitas: 'It is cruel to disappoint the wishes of a father—it is more so to send down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave; it is distressing to lacerate the feelings of a brother, and deprive him of a glorious distinction, that of having a virtuous sister.' Within the respectable and middling class members of the free community, and within the discourse constructed within the pages of the *Watchman*, the sexual relationships brown women had with white men was a point of shame, but also undermined the authority of the brown men in their family.[51]

## BEYOND THE WATCHMAN: DEFINING MOTHERHOOD AND POLICING CONCUBINAGE

The critique of free women of colour was not limited to discourse within the newspaper, but had implications on the lived experiences of women in Jamaica. Letters published in the newspaper aimed to 'expose this wretched vice' of concubinage. From late 1832 this included naming and shaming women involved in this practice. For instance, the objective of the letter written by Moralitas and discussed above was to deter a 'Miss M.C.—', a women of colour he describe as 'a female of respectable family' from entering into non-marital and sexual relationship with 'Dr.F—', a young white man from 'Scotia's Shores'. In the letter, Moralitas threatened to provide the names of both parties if they pursued the relationship. Two weeks later Moralitas wrote to the *Watchman* again, stating that 'before you had published my letter the foul deed was done. Miss Mary Campbell, on Wednesday night last, regardless of shame, fled from her father's house to that of Dr. James Forrest, assistant Surgeon in the 84th Regiment.'[52] By publishing their names, Moralitas acted on his threat, exposing Mary Campbell and James Forrest to the potential 'scorn and ridicule of the world', to be shunned by all respectable company. Moralitas was not the only one to use the *Watchman* as a space to publically expose women engaged in interracial concubinage. By shaming and exposing the practice, letters aimed to curb the prevalence of the practice and incite in women a transformation in attitude.

Many of the letters to the editor that addressed concubinage also called for readers to disassociate themselves from concubines and to exclude these women from society.

Repeatedly, correspondents advised respectable women and men of colour to avoid the society of known concubines, including mothers and other female members of family in such relationships. For instance, in response to Constantia's letter, discussed above, The Friendly Auld Man advised that Constantia not only disobey her mother's instructions (to form a relationship with a white man), but to avoid her altogether. He writes:

> Your parent, by her unnatural and despicable conduct, has rendered herself unworthy of your obedience. She has forfeited her relation to you untill [sic] she repents of having named to you such a course of degradation; she has ceased to lust for the gold she would have received as the price of your dishonour...Would the Ladies of Colour, who are honourably married, but set themselves steadfastly against the base characters who choose such a life; would they but expel them from their houses and refuse to associate with them; would they but expose as they could do with virtuous indignation, the disgrace these silly females have submitted to, we should soon see other times.[53]

As he states in the letter, the 'unnatural and despicable' conduct of brown concubines was in opposition to the proper role of mothers and therefore broke the natural bond between mother and child. It was in the interest of daughters and other respectable women to 'expel' such debased women, even if they are their mothers, from their lives.

Other correspondents supported the ostracization of concubines. One correspondent discussed interracial concubinage as a 'contagious disorder' and advised 'the performance of strict Quarantine' from the society of such women.[54] Another correspondent advised respectable ladies to 'shun the society' of concubines, 'shun them,' he wrote, 'as you would mad dogs—for it is only by so doing that yourselves will be respected.'[55] These calls to exclude women engaged in concubinage from respectable community were not just airless threats, but were put into practice. For instance, In the

rules for admission or exclusion to the Wesleyan Church, members were 'warned against visiting such persons, or being intimate with them'.[56] The church was particularly concerned about mothers who benefitted from their daughters engagement in sexual-economic exchange.[57] According to the admission and exclusion rules, 'mothers receiving support from daughters living in concubinage with white, coloured or black or countenancing them in anyway in their iniquity, cannot be in Society'.[58] It was not only the support that the Wesleyan Church cautioned its members against, but also, as the quote states, mothers who encouraged (or otherwise solicited) such relationships on their daughters behalf.

Letters to the editor regarded concubines as unacceptable company for 'respectable' women of colour in society. These women were tainted and dangerous. The only way for the community to be rid of concubinage was through the exclusion of women involved in such relationships from respectable society. As one community member stated, only 'by drawing this strict line of demarcation the profligate will be convinced of [her] degradation, and led to turn from the errors of [her] ways'.[59] The extent to which women were excluded is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the letters to the editor published in the *Watchman* informed practice and had at least some impact on the lived experiences of free women of colour in Jamaica.

## CONCLUSION

The letters published in the *Watchman* between 1830 and 1833 provide insight into the attitudes around motherhood and interracial concubinage. Drawing upon

longstanding notions of black and brown women as sexually permissive, immoral women and bad mothers as well as ideals of British middle class ideals of respectability and gender roles, letters published in the *Watchman* contributed to a discourse that linked women's sexual praxis to their ability to be good mothers and raise respectable children. Women engaged in interracial concubinage were described as not only corrupt and degraded women, but also bad mothers. The concubines supposed fixation on wealth and materialism to the exclusion of their children's moral and spiritual well-being revealed their deviation from respectable motherhood and womanhood. Moreover, their role as concubines to white men emasculated brown men and was seen to hinder any progress the community could make. So long as women who in engaged in non-marital and interracial sexual relations were accepted within the community, the community could never achieve the respectability and thus the legitimate claim to citizenship required to achieve political equality. Moreover, the ideas discussed in the *Watchman* contributed to a vision of gender and domestic in the post-slavery period. The contributors to the *Watchman* envisioned a post-slavery society in which women would take up their proper roles as wives to brown men and mothers of legitimate brown children. In doing so, brown men could take their proper roles as husbands, fathers, and political leaders.

[1] Contemporary text regularly used the terms 'brown', 'coloured' or 'of colour' to describe a person of mixed European and African ancestry. These texts also used the terms 'prostitute', 'concubines', 'mistress', or 'housekeeper' to describe any non-marital sexual relationship, particularly when such relationship involved women of African ancestry and a man of European ancestry, whether that relationship was coercive or consensual. In this article, I use the terms 'concubine' and 'concubinage' to refer specifically to interracial non-marital sexual relationships between free mixed-race women and white men. Drawing on the works of Kemala Kempadoo and Amelia L. Cabezas, I also use the term 'sexual-economic exchange' as a way of noting the transactional nature of these relationships. See Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Amalia L. Cabezas, *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); and, Meleisa Ono-George, 'To be Despised': Discourses of Sexual-Economic Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica, c. 1780-1890' (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2014).

[2] For a discussion of the politics of the archives, race and sex in the nineteenth-century British Caribbean, see Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[3] Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 7-8.

[4] Lucille Mathurin Mair, *A Historical Study of Women of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006), 268 and Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004),16. For more on the emergence of a politically active community of colour, see Heuman, *Between Black and White*.

[5] See Heuman, *Between Black and White* for more on discriminatory laws in Jamaica and the struggle for civil equality. See Melanie Newton, *The Children of Africa in the Colonies: Free People of Color in Barbados in the Age of Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008) for discussion of similar laws and movement in Barbados.

[6] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 107-115.

[7] David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christer Petley, '"Home' and 'this country": Britishness and Creole Identity in the Letters of a Transatlantic Slaveholder', *Atlantic Studies*, 6 (2009): 43-61.

[8] Melanie Newton, 'Philanthropy, Gender, and the Production of Public Life in Barbados, ca. 1790—ca.1850' in Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (eds), *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 228.

[9] Heuman, *Between Black and White*, 13-4.

[10] Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 103; Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 329.

[11] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 31 March 1830.

[12] Newton, *The Children of Africa in the Colonies*, 238-40.
[13] *Votes of the Assembly of Jamaica* (1828) cited in Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica*, 287.
[14] Newton, *The Children of Africa*, 240.
[15] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinities and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 17; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes,* 74
[16] Mavis Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society: A Sociopolitical History of the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1800-1865* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 157. The free community of colour was not completely united in opposition to the plantocracy in Jamaica. Some were allied to the Establishment. For more on this, see Heuman, *Between Black and White*, 85.
[17] For more on Jordan and Osborn, Heuman, *Between Black and White*, 58-9.
[18] Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society*, 158.
[19] Andrew Lewis, 'An incendiary press': British West Indian newspapers during the struggle for abolition', *Slavery & Abolition, 16:3* (1995): 355.
[20] Alpen Razi, '"Coloured Citizens of the World": The Networks of Empire Loyalism in Emancipation-Era Jamaica and the Rise of the Transnational Black Press', *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism* 23.2 (2013), 108.
[21] Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnson, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79.
[22] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 23 January 1833.
[23] I have only included letters to the editor that discuss interracial concubinage between women of colour and white men.
[24] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 1 October 1831.
[25]This point sets this study apart from some of the discourses around domesticity and interracial sex found in white-authored abolitionist and pro-planter text discussed in Henrice Altink's study. See Henrice Altink, *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses of Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[26] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes,* 335.
[27] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 1 October 1831.
[28] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 21 September 1831.
[29] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 1 October 1831.
[30] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 12 April 1830.
[31] Altink, *Representations of Slave Women*, 84.
[32] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 30 April 1830 and 12 April 1830.
[33] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 24 September 1831.
[34]*Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 14 September 1831.
[35] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 10 August 1830
[36] See examples in J.B. Moreton, *West India Customs and Manners* (London: J. Parsons, et al, 1793),126-7.
[37] John Clarke, *Memoir of Richard Merrick [Followed By] Memoir of Joseph Merrick* (London, 1850), 26. See also James A. Thome and Joseph H. Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months' Tour in Antigua, Barbados, and Jamaica in the year 1837* (New York, 1838), 97-101.
[38] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 24 September 1831.

[39]*Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 23 May 1832.
[40] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 17 April 1830.
[41] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 3 September 1831.
[42] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, August 30, 1831.
[43] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 26 October 1831
[44] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 26 October 1831
[45] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 26 October 1831
[46] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, August 30, 1831.
[47] For instance, see Karina Williamson (ed.), *Marly: Or, a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (Oxford: MacMillian Education, 2002), 190.
[48] Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica*, 2-3 and 292.
[49] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 14 April 1830.
[50] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 12 February 1831.
[51]*Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 13 November 1833.
[52] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 30 November 1833.
[53] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 24 April 1830.
[54] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 24 September 1831.
[55] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 3 September 1831.
[56] Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 'On the Admission and Exclusion of Members', 1829, Box 129 Sheet 1.
[57] Heuman, *Between Black and White,* 13-4.
[58] Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, MMS/03. Jamaica 1833-1840 'On the Admission and Exclusion of Members', 1829, Box 129 Sheet 1.
[59] *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 1 October 1831.